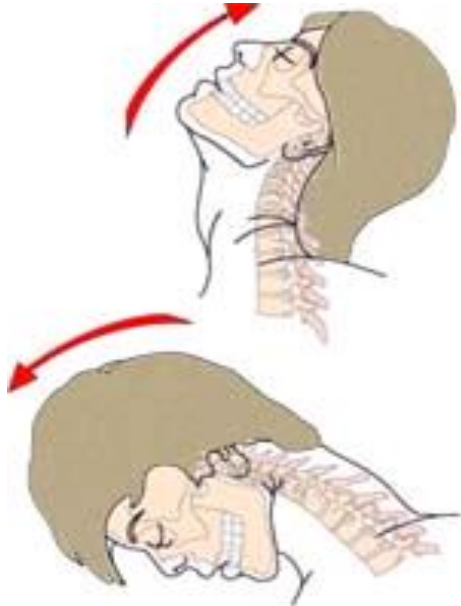


## What is whiplash?

Whiplash is usually caused by a car crash, typically a "rear-ender". The neck is suddenly extended backwards by the force of the collision, and then forwards again.



## What are Whiplash Associated Disorders?

Whiplash-Associated Disorders, or **WAD** describes a range of neck problems caused by a whiplash injury. Muscles, ligaments, discs, nerves or some combination of these may be injured, or in some cases, nothing is damaged at all. Injuries to any of these soft tissues can produce similar symptoms. It is not always necessary to know precisely what has been damaged, since treatments for most soft tissue injuries are similar.

## What are the symptoms of WAD?

- ✧ Pain and stiffness in the neck. It may take several hours to a few days after the injury for symptoms to appear.
- ✧ Pain into the shoulders and/or upper back and arms.
- ✧ Altered sensation such as pins and needles, and weakness in the arms
- ✧ Dizziness and/or headaches.
- ✧ Turning or bending the neck may be difficult

Consult your GP after a car accident if you have:

- ✧ Medium or severe pain in your neck
- ✧ Difficulty moving your head
- ✧ Arm numbness or weakness
- ✧ Drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, confusion
- ✧ Any symptoms that are worsening

## How long does it take to recover from whiplash?

Aches and pains are part of the body's reaction to trauma and stress and people respond differently. It is thought that by three months post-injury, about one third of people with a whiplash injury will have recovered, about one third will still have mild pain and disability and about one third will still experience quite high pain levels and disability.

A positive approach is required. The people that seem to recover the best are those that can continue with their normal activities or work even though they have aches and pains that take a while to subside.

## Treatment

- ✧ An "active" recovery is recommended. This is where you should get on with ordinary life as soon as possible. Normal activities may hurt, but provided the pain is not severe or increasing you are not doing yourself any harm and indeed this is the route to recovery. The people who cope best with whiplash are those who stay active, exercise their necks and get on with life despite the pain.
- ✧ Immediately after the accident you may wish to modify your work, home and leisure activities for a few days or so.
- ✧ Gentle exercise for your neck has also been shown to help with recovery. A series of specific exercises can help restore the movement in your neck as well as to improve muscle control of your neck and shoulder blade for postural support. An experienced physiotherapist will be able to instruct you regarding correct technique.

- ✦ Simple analgesics, such as paracetamol, can be taken for pain relief. If taken regularly these may prevent the pain from getting severe, and enable you to exercise and keep your neck active.
- ✦ To drive safely you must be able to turn your head quickly. It is best not to drive until any moderate to severe pain or stiffness has settled.

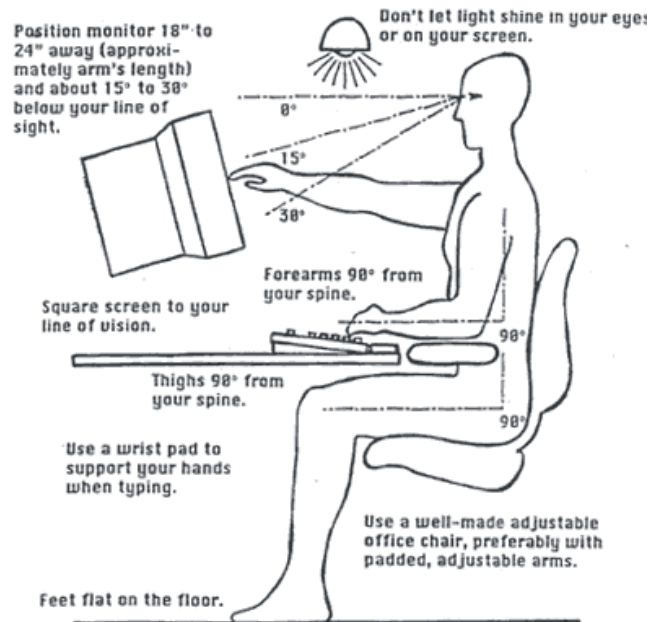
### Other treatments that may help:

- ✦ Try a cold pack for 20 minutes every few hours initially, then change this to a hot pack after a few days. Remember to always wrap your ice/hot pack in a towel to prevent direct contact to the skin which may cause a burn.
- ✦ Passive joint mobilisation or manipulation by a Physiotherapist. This may help to reduce pain and improve the movement in your neck.
- ✦ Improving your posture while sitting, standing or working at a computer may help to prevent postural strain on a sore neck. A Physiotherapist will be able to advise you on how best to correct your posture. (See Figure 1)
- ✦ Acupuncture, traction, passive treatments and electrotherapies

### Treatments that are not recommended:

- ✦ Bed rest
- ✦ Use of a neck collar or neck brace
- ✦ Cervical pillows
- ✦ "spray and stretch"
- ✦ Injections of steroids or local anaesthetics
- ✦ Magnetic necklaces
- ✦ Pilates, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, massage and homeopathy

**Figure 1: Correct sitting posture**



Contact Ethos Health on (02) 4962 8700 for more information or an appointment for treatment of your WAD.

The Motor Accidents Authority website [www.maa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.maa.nsw.gov.au) also has further information on WAD.

### References

1. Summary Guidelines for the Management of Acute Whiplash-Associated Disorders for Health Professionals – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2007
2. Jull G, Sterling M, Kenardy J, Beller E (2007 in press) Does the presence of sensory hypersensitivity influence outcomes of physical rehabilitation for chronic whiplash? A preliminary RCT. *Pain*

